Improving Parent Involvement

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Abstract

Parent involvement outside of school has been an issue within three rural southern Virginia counties. Families that suffer the low socioeconomic status level have interferences with their jobs, which can cause a conflict when devoting time to their children’s relationship and helping with school (Velsor & Orozco, 2007). The gap between recent studies towards improvement of parent involvement has been that parents were not using at home-based activities but rather than basic schoolwork given by teachers for children to finish at home. The purpose of this research was to address the problem of parents involvement that are associated with their children that are in the program Head Start. Head Start is a federally funded program for low income families that suffer from a certain amount of income that is considerably low (Parker et al., 2000). Through our data collected we want to understand if at home activities improve parent involvement with low income families. This will be evaluated by eighty-six families by a survey that was sent home to the parents. The collected data that was analyzed was through a mixed method study. Including qualitative data that used open ended question and the quantitative data used was closed ended questions through a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Themes that were found included positive interactions, togetherness within the family, and increase in family time. The key statistical results found that respondents of 91.4 % parents had their child attempt the at home activity Noodle Necklace activity and had an average of 9 out of a 10 point spectrum towards improving their relationship with their child. This study means that parent involvement is increased by including at home activites with children.

The relationship that was associated with adults as a child regarding who took care of them has played a key role in regards to the lifetime of growing up. Throughout the three rural Virgina counties be studied have faced low income has had a promblen with parent inovement outside of the school setting.

Studies have been conducted regarding parent involvement in low income counties. Children behavior plays an essential role throughout parents ivolvment. For example, parent engagement helps with children having positive reinforcement rather than having disruptivie behavior. According to Harris and Robinson (2016), families facing harsh conditions may cuase a negative affect on parents’ value of school, which than is ingrained in their own children. Which is an important subject to study that relates to understanding if finding out activities have a positive impact on parents' relationship with their child regarding low income families. Deficiencies in the past studies like according to Patall, Copper, & Robinsion (2008) used homework for understanding improvement of parent ivolvemnt rather than at home activites that are not school based related. We would like for our research to identify whether or not the activities given to parents helps with improving parents become more involved in a child's life. The purpose of this research is to better understand parents involvement with children three to five year olds that are in the Head Start program.

**Literature Review**

Understanding the affect of how activities can improve parent involvement regarding low income families requires further research. There needs to be a well understanding of what exactly includes parent involvement and also what establishes a family being known as low income. According to Lee and Bowen (2006), parent involvement can include parents being in the Parent Teacher Association, going to dances, going to parent- teacher meetings, giving help on homework, and communicating with their children about their day at school. Head Start is a well-known federally funded program for low income families that suffer from a certain amount of income that is considerably low (Parker et al., 2000). Parent involvement plays a key part of the Head Start program with helping parents’ skills for better opportunity with success for their child’s development.

**Home based involvement vs. School-based involvement**

 Activities that are part of home-based parent involvement rather than parent involvement in a school setting has a lower advantage of parents improving their relationship with their children (Garbacz, McDowall, Schaughency, Sheridan, & Welch, 2015). An example for parent involvement in a school setting includes homework specifically. Helping children with homework has limitations including, the parent’s strategy, resources that are provided at home, and the child’s age (Patall, Copper, & Robinsion, 2008). Time for children while trying to keep a family stable financially can be hard. For example, families that suffer being on the low socioeconomic status level have interference with their jobs, which can cause an issue when devoting time to their children’s relationship and helping with school (Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Parent involvement can help the child to have a stronger bond and enhance social skills as well. Harris and Robinson (2016), described a framework for parent involvement, which described that a tradition framework is based on one strategy fits all children but instead a stage-setting concept that focuses on messages and life space relating to children is a better strategy for parents. The state-setting model includes all diversity of children including children who face attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which is focused in the behavior section of this literature. Not every child has the same norms as another child and therefore activities that focus on that particular child and parent is important.

**Behavior with parent involvement.** As research has overlooked at home- base involvement with young children the behavior of children should be discussed. For example, parent’s involvement can help control certain type of behavior. Parents are able to influence children’s behavior by giving commands, directions and love, which can have an affect of children doing well in school and at home. Not every child acts the same under the same conditions, that being stated shows the importance to understand children that face different diversity. One program known as Family School Success helps with families who have children that suffer from ADHD (Mautone, Lefler, & Power, 2011). According to Mautone et al. (2011), the importance for behavior interventions such as “Family School Success” is to increase parents’ attention to their child and do so in a positive reinforcer way regarding with certain behavior, but do not encourage deviance behavior. By having parents learn this strategy and actually practice positive reinforcement can improve relationships at home, school, and in the community, and even in the low socioeconomic class. A National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth were used in a research regarding about 10,000 children to understand how parent involvement and guidance are associated to children’s behavior (Tramonte, Gauthier & Wilms, 2013). A child’s behavior with physical aggression can be an important topic for why parenting is important. According to Tamonte et al., (2013), stated, “… guidance does not have a significant protective effect at age 6 for either inattention or physical aggression, but as children age it does have a protective effect for inattention” (p.412). Guidance towards children may not be shown in the short term, but from this type of evidence provides data that guidance can have a long-term affect on children.

***Low income disadvantages.*** The socialization of low-income families that face poverty can have a hard time with parents being involved in their children’s lives regarding any activities. Tekin (2011), summarized Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory which was used to understand the influence of social factors, such as socioeconomic class and that these factors for development is significant. For example, the socioeconomic status role that parents play when getting divorce can have a negative affect on a child’s well-being and relationship with parents as well. Families have a hard time financially when parents are divorced and are already stressed with work and providing time to their young children. In a recent study by Bratberg and Tjotta (2008), which focused on the effects of divorce and demonstrates that women that experience divorce and do not contain custody have more than 30 % inflow of money rather than mothers who do have custody. That being said most of the inflow of money goes towards keeping custody over the child. Understanding the economic status of the families that are facing divorce is just as important as understanding the parent involvement. According to Brown (2010), marriage rates are the lowest in the low- income population. Poverty plays a factor with a relationship and data has been collected with understanding the affects of the relationship among children and parents. For example, living in harsh conditions like poverty can have a negative affect on parents’ value of school and actions that are ingrained in their children (Harris & Robinson, 2016). The Head Start program has helped low income families especially for African American mothers. Researchers have used interviews to examine low-income mothers that participated in Head Start for their preschoolers (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2015). The African American mothers used their previous experiences with their mothers to participate in their owns child’s life. Parents that face poverty also have limitations towards the sources they can use to be involved in the child’s life. For example, more activities that improve parent involvement for the lower class should be focused on low cost items. Keeping a family stable and facing poverty is hard, but even more hard to ask about a child’s day or having energy to play with the child when the parent has been working long hours and is exhausted.

Research has been done and has helped understand parent involvement especially the low economic class. Home-base activities need to be more diverse depending on the child rather just a one fits all with children. The stage setting model is a good model to help with all children from high class, middle class, low class, and even children who face different health and mental issues (Harrison & Robinson. 2016). Also, all activities do not have to be towards education, but need to be cost sufficient and can improve a parent’s involvement. For example, something as simple as tag. Having a clear understanding of the limitations that low income classes face regarding what supplies they have and the type of behavior their child faces can help with bringing families closer.

**Data and Method**

**Study Design and Sample**

The type of data that is being collected is evaluation research. Evaluation research purpose is to determine the impact of the type of social intervention that was provided (Babbie 2014). The social intervention are the activities that are being sent home, which include the Thankful Turkey Activity, and Animal Dice Activity, a Noodle Necklace Activity, a Stress Ball Balloon Activity, and a Sugar tray Writing Activity that will evaluate parent’s involvement. The population that was chosen for this project were families with children in the Head Start Program. The sample of our research was families with children attending Head Start in three rural southern Virginia counties, which included eighty-six families. The reason our sample was chosen is because the Head Start program works with parent’s involvement with low income families and is close to our location. The participants that were supposed to complete these actives included three to five-year old children who face low income. The parents of families that are in Head Start program are to complete a survey that focuses on the parent involvement. The overall compliance rate of the survey was 51.16 %.

**Procedure**

The survey contained a consent form for all participants and followed the human subject’s protection using the Institutional Review Board. A pen and paper survey for each participant to fill out was handed out and completed. Each different activity had questions on the survey that were multiple choice and open ended. The survey questions were conducted by college students that are wanting to meet the smart objective of the activity and focus on parent involvement. The surveys were dropped off at the Head Start facility. From the Head Start facility the Head Start teachers picked up the surveys and then sent the surveys home with the children along with the activity. A five-dollar gift card was attached to the surveys to help encourage the guardian of the children to fill out and bring back to the school. The survey was then sent back with the children that gave the surveys back to the Head Start teachers to drop back off at the facility. Having the surveys sent back to Head Start allowed for the data to be collected and examined. Descriptive analysis is was used throughout our experiment to collect data.

**Quantitative Data and Methods**

The survey concluded six questions at least and seven at most regarding to each different activity. To measure our data of how activities improved parent involvement, we had the participants answer the question, “*How much did this activity help to improve you and your child’s/children’s relationship?*”. Responses are on a 10-point spectrum (0 = Not at all, 10= Very much). Also, we asked, “*How would you rate your current relationship with your child/children?”* and *“From the following choices, please choose the most appropriate levelof completion for this activity?”.* The first responses were also on a 10-point spectrum (0=Mostly negative, 10=Mostly positive) and how many hours (1-10 or more). The second question was a multiple choice that included attempted and completed, attempted but did not completed, and did not attempt. The enjoyment of the activities was also collected by the survey. The question that was asked was “*How involved was your family in this activity?”* The responses were based on a 10-point scale(0=Not at all, 10=Very much). Participants had to answer demographic variables that included who all lives in the household, the race or ethnicity of the family, and the level of education completed in the household.

**Quantitative Analysis**

The data that is being measured is through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences issues 25. Also known as SPSS, which examined the closed ended questions understanding the descriptive statistics of the level of enjoyment, improvement of child’s/children’s relationship, and the smart objective of each activity.

**Qualiative Data and Methods**

The data collected included open-ended questions. Four open ended questions were place in the beginning of the survey and were to be answered. The most important open-ended question for understanding improvement of the relationship with the child included, *“Do you think that being provided with pre-planned activities increased the amount of fun time you got to spend with your family after school? Please explain.”.* The purpose of having open ended questions was to have participants answer with in depth detail regarding how each activity affected every family and what they gained from the activities.

 **Qualitative analysis**

Four open ended questions provided data that help to explore themes related to family involvement. Codes for recurring themes were used in regards to family involvement for measurement of the data.

**Mixed Method Analysis**

Mixed method analysis was used throughout the experiment. According to Grossman and Porche (2013), quantitative and qualitative gives better intel towards weather the information is confirmed and possibly help enhanced one anothers findings. Mixed method analysis was used throughout the experiment to help give a better insigt towards more in depth data collected. Using qualitative and quantative data provides more ensurances towards our findings when collecting the data. Also using both can help the audience that prefer a certain type of data to be done and using a mixed methodology helps with providing very detail information.

**Quantitative Findings**

For our dependent variable throughout the experiment we were looking for the improvement of the relationship with the parents towards their children. Table 1’s findings help support our research question that activities helped improve the parent’s improvement. The questions used to collect data for improvement with parent involvement was *“On a scale from 0-10, how much did this activity help improve you and your child’s/children’s relationship?”* This question was a continuous scale question where the mean was taken into account. Our findings showed that the respondents had an 8.57 mean within the continuous scale in regard to the improvement of the relationship after the activity was given to the parents that apart of Head Start.

Table 1

*Improvement relationship between parents and child/children scale*

Mean 8.57

Median 10

Mode 10

The independent variable that was used for our data was the completion of the activities given to the parents to complete with their children. The data collected showed in Table 2 reports that 91.4% of respondents attempted and completed the activity. The respondents who attempted and did not complete the activity resulted in 8.6%.

Table 2

*Noddle Necklace Activity Percentage of Completion*

Completion Count %

­­Attempted and completed 32 91.4

Attempted but did not complete 3 8.6

Total 35 100

*Note:* The percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth and the total was rounded to the nearest whole.

Table 3 shows the correlation between the completion of the activity towards improving parent’s involvement. The completion of the activity positively correlated with improving parent’s involvement. Parents who had their kids attempt and completed had an average score of 9 on the improvement of the relationships. The respondents who attempted and did not complete the noodle necklace activity had an average score of 4 regarding the improvement of parent’s relationship with their children. The data altogether shows that the at home activities improved the relationships between the parents and the children.

Table 3

*The Completion of Activities Towards Improvement of Parent Involvement*

 Completion of Activity Mean of improvement Count

Attempted and completed 9 32

Attempted but not completed 4 3

The key findings of our study have showed the importance of parents completing activities with their children. The completion of the activity does not just improve the child’s relationship with their parents, but also improves parent’s involvement overall with their children. It is important to see that the respondent of 91.4% parents had their child attempt the noodle necklace activity and complete it had an average of 9 towards improving the relationship with their children. The data shown throughout the tables gives insight towards supporting that the activities improved the relations between the parents and children.

**Qualitative Findings**

Qualitative findings show how at home activities improve parent involvement with low income families. The recurring themes in the nineteen Family Fun Time Activities Survey reported back to Head Start included positive interactions, togetherness within the family, and increase in family time. The data collected from these recurring themes include using open ended coding, which helps compare and contrast the different themes throughout the parents answers.

Positive interactions was a common theme found throughout the data. Having positive interactions helps with building a healthy family environment for the children and the parents. Improving parent involvement with families in Head Start was successful regarding the qualitative data. For example, Respondent 10 expressed the activities were “Great to promote healthy family activities. Making it fun.” The words “enjoyable” and “fun” can correlate with families having a positive interaction when completing the activities. One of the qualitative questions on the survey asked “If you could change at least one thing about these activities for future use, what would it be?” Similarly, the majority of the responses to this question included none or nothing for the response. For example, Respondent 8 said, “nothing we enjoyed each one,” which is important to note that the word “we” was used and concludes that not just the child enjoyed the interaction, but the parent as well. To help support the positive interactions that was gained was shown through Respondent 12’s answers. Respondent 12 stated, “We loved the ‘Animal Dice Activity’ most because not only was it hands on, it was very informative and super interactive.”

The second theme that was expressed throughout the surveys was togetherness within the family. Many parents have to work long shifts for their jobs and may even work two jobs. Many families were brought together to help with the activities and were not used to having this option. For example, Respondent 13 expressed, “We were together doing these activities; my brother, me and my son. We don’t usually do these kind of things together. I want to continue doing things together. My son was happy and it was fun.” Respondent 13’s statement helps support the data that at home activities can improve parent involvement by continuing doing things such as activities together. Also it is important to note that they had a positive interactions with each other by having fun together. The families togetherness helped with building team player skills for parents and the child. Respondent 15 expressed what was gained from the activities, “We all gained experience in following directions and working together”. Bringing togetherness throughout the family may have included everybody in the household or just one family member either way the data supports our hypothesis. Respondent 18 stated, “Yes, everyone wanted to participate and help”, which gives evidence that everybody in that family wanted to be involved with the activities and improve parent involvement.

Increasing family time was a common theme that was shown throughout the survey. Providing time to have interaction with children or the child is essential for building a stronger relationship within the family environment at home. Respondent 17 agrees that family time is important and expressed, “... spending time is very important.Communicating, family members voicing opinions”. The activities were already pre planned and we got similar responses about how nice it was to have an activity prepared. For example, Respondent 13 discussed, “...I didn’t have to look for things to do or go to the store to buy supplies. I don't have transportation. '' Family time was created for the parent and child and was demonstrated by Respondent 15 who expressed, “It provided us with family time”. The difference between family time and togetherness within the family can be distinguished because family time is time that is set aside for interactions between the parents and child on purpose and togetherness within the family is casual everyday activities throughout the home.

Overall the data supported from the open ending coding helps support our hypothesis about how at home activities help improves parents involvement that classify for Head Start. The themes that continue to be displayed throughout the survey includes positive interactions, togetherness within the family, and increasing family time. Each theme has a crucial objective to help understand parents involvement.

**Conclusion**

Parent involvement is a common interaction that is important for children development. The three rural low income southern Virgina counties that have been included in our research helps jusfity the question of how at home activities improves parent involvement with low income families. Previous literature has helped with undrtstading the affects of parents involvement and home based towards children’s behavior. Previous research towards poverty helps give an good understanding towards the economic status that is related to the familys that are included in the Head Start program. For example, divorice rates has an affect on income throughout a family and marriage rates tend to have the lowest in the low- income populations, which relate to our three rural counties choosen for our research because single parents have to spend more of their quality time working to be finically stable rather than spending time with their children (Brown 2010). Also according to Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2015), African American mothers that participated in Head Start used their previous experiences with their mothers towards parent invoment, which can include an negative aditiude if parent involvement was barely around growing up.

Its important to remeber that the families that are associated with Head Start are families of low income that suffer from a certain amount of income that is considerably low (Parker et al., 2000). Evaluation research was used throughout the research and the collection of data was through an mixed method using quanitative and qualitative datat. At home activites including the Thankful Turkey Activity, and Animal Dice Activity, a Noodle Necklace Activity, a Stress Ball Balloon Activity, and a Sugar Tray Writing Activity were given to three to five year olds to complete and have parents fill out a survey about their experience with their children in relation if improvement was shown within their realationship. Our findings using open ended questions provided data back stating that the three theames expressed were positive interactions, togetherness within the family, and increase in family time, which supported our hypothsis that if activities are given to families that face low income then we expect parents involvement to improve their relationship with children. The close ended question showed key findings that the completion of at home activities from families in Head Start improved relationships. For example, respondent of 91.4% parents had their child attempt the noodle necklace activity and complete it had an average of 9 on a 10 point spectrum on the survey with improvement of the relationship with their children.

Overall the purpose of this study is to understand parents involment with three to five years in hopes to find out if at home activities improve parent involvement with low income families. All together the survey used to conduct data supports the hypothsis that at home activites do help improve parent involvement. Limitation that were shown throughout the survey completion was an issue because not 100% of surveys were given back in a timely manner. Furture research can be conducted about at home activities that may help improve parent involvement from younger ages towards mid-teens. Conducting future research could help improve an better understating of the long term affects on parent improvement from getting involved with at home activites from three to five year old children to mid-teens. This can be evaulted by having a survey given with at home activies like this research was for children at a young age and with older age.

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